

Movie Makers

November- December, 2000

Volume 10 No. 6

The American Motion Picture Society

71st Annual American International Film and Video Festival Competition Results

The results are in! The 71st annual American International Film and Video Festival is over and the judges have spoken.

First held in New York City in 1930, The American International Film and Video Festival is the oldest such event in the world. The American Motion Picture Society was organized to perpetuate the festival.

This year's festival received entries from Canada, England, Germany, and the United States.

A special thanks goes to the San Diego Amateur Movie Makers Club for running the competition this year. The chair was Vic Brown, and members involved in the festival were Joyce Axelrod, Eldon Garretson, Mary Ellen Ecklund, Walt Hansen, Ed Kamps and Dick Allen. Without their help and guidance, the festival would not have happened.

1st Place,
Ten Best and Best Cinematography

"Meteora, Sky High Monasteries"
produced by Bill & Mary Ann Leeder.

2nd Place,
Ten Best and Best Foreign Entry
"Schlussel/The Key"
Produced by Oskar & Daniela Siebert.

3rd Place,
Ten Best, Best Documentary
"Daniel Boone"
Produced by G.W. Turk

Ten Best, Best Story
"The Bag Lady"
James Beach

Ten Best, Best Editing
"Lost Wax"
James Beach

Ten Best
"Nothing Is Forever"
Produced by Ephraim Horowitz

Ten Best
"The Cherry-Red Cadillac Convertible"
Howard H. Farley

Ten Best

"Athens Alive"
Bill & Mary Ann Leeder

Ten Best
"Crime Scene Cleaners"
David Sperling

Ten Best
"Drunk In Public"
David Sperling

Most Creative
"Thol Aid's Last Stand"
Carroll F. Lam

Best Nature
"The Cardinals"
Produced by Wally Shaw

AMPS Winners Reel

To see the winning entries in this year's festival, send a check or money order for seven dollars for U.S. orders and \$10 for International orders, made out to the American Motion Picture Society.

AMPS mailing address is 30 Kanan Rd. Oak Park, CA 91377-1105.

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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MOVIE MAKERS is published bi-monthly on the 25th day of odd-numbered months by the AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY and features news and articles of interest to the serious motion picture maker, video or film.

Membership price per year is \$7.00, Canada \$9.00, foreign addresses \$10.00, all payable in U.S. funds or equivalent. Articles may be copied when the source is given. Back copies are available at .80 cents post paid.

George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1995

Matt Jenkins, Editor

The AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY is not connected with any other organization, society, club or association. The Society does not offer dual, club, nor group memberships.

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From the Editor

The more I learn about film/video festivals, the less I feel I know about them. George Cushman's article illustrates the point that when allowing the audience to judge, they will reward what they like and not necessarily what is considered to be a good production.

I think this premise can be extended to the pre-screeners and judges in festivals. In my opinion, a judge will often vote for what is liked and not what is good. In the academic world, when conducting research, observation is a tool often used to determine certain outcomes. Experts are gathered to conduct the observations. However for the research to be valid, the researchers must be trained to agree on what they are observing. I once conducted a study where observers had to rate the reference pages of term papers. My results were disastrous as one observer thought the references were excellent and another thought they were horrible. So the study had poor "interrater" reliability. In other words the observers didn't agree on what constituted a quality reference page. Perhaps the pre-screeners or judges should be trained in what constitutes a "good" production prior to judging a competition.

Maybe then there will be less of surprise when entering a production in different competitions.

The results for the latest American International Film and Video Festival are on the front page. Congratulations to all those who won. Look for a winner's reel to come out shortly.

Speaking of the festival, I just received the judges' comments for my entry. I had been stewing a bit on the fact that the piece didn't place. The judges' comments were very revealing. Three of the judges indicated a problem with the audio. Specifically, the audio levels seemed to vary greatly and at one point seemed to drop off. All I can say is something must have happened when I made the copy as the master has quality audio all the way through. However, I did not check the entire copy after I made it. Of course the audio problem was my fault since I did not check the copy all the way through. The morale of the story is, check your entry all the way through and be sure you get the judge's comments if you can.

As always you may e-mail me at mattj@cameron.edu.

Matt Jenkins

TECHNICAL VIDEO GREETINGS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Now is the time to start planning a Christmas or holidays video.

The September issue of Video-maker magazine has an article on producing video postcards and that reminded me. The holiday season is coming up and last year we supplemented some of our Christmas cards with a video greeting. We did this for some of our far away friends and relatives and it was greatly appreciated. Besides it was fun doing it.

Here is what we did as well as some ideas for variations that might suit you better.

Hattie and I sat in front of my camcorder and recorded a Christmas Video consisting of a heartfelt message followed by an account of our activities for the past year.

Here are some ideas for making it an interesting project and I'm sure you will think of more once you get started. So get started now it takes some thought and time but is easy to do and will be appreciated.

1. Write out your greeting and message and decide who says what and when. Once you have written it down and rehearsed a couple of times you can probably remember the essence of it without reading it, but if necessary read it. It won't matter. Or type it with a large black font so you can see it like a prompter without the camera seeing it. Try and make it relaxed and conversational like you are talking directly to someone.

2. Select a comfortable place to sit with a pleasant background and check for and eliminate any background noises. It is a good idea to feed your camera into a monitor you can see and check for objectionable reflections and good light-

ing. Usually room lights and lamps will work better than window light and will be more reliable.

3. A camcorder with a view screen that you can turn to face forward is ideal as you can monitor yourself. If not the camcorder can be fed into a TV monitor while you are recording. If you can't do either just record it without a monitor.

4. I prefer to frame the speakers together but zoom in as close as you can and still leave enough margin for the speakers to move a bit. Here it gets a bit tricky, as it is best to have the camera some distance back so the image won't be distorted (big noses,) however too far back and you can't see the viewscreen.

5. Background music is good if kept low enough to not interfere with the voices. It may be best to dub it on later if you have that capability. If you record in Hi-8 or 8mm you will have to dub it on the VHS copy that you send. If you record on VHS or S-VHS you can dub on the master.

6. Keep your greeting rather short, as you may want to change settings for the relating of activities during the year. If you are a couple you may want to take turns relating different things. Don't try and tell everything that happened, limit the scope and just pick key events or activities and hit the highlights. If you may be sending this to people who haven't kept up with your life or family you should clearly identify people, places and times.

7. Different settings around the house or outdoors to show it off may be of interest.

8. Snapshots of the kids or other family members or activities may be of interest. I suggest writing out a brief description and reading it while recording the snapshot. That will determine the length of the shot. To make the shot just fasten the snapshot to a plain black or

colored card set it up in good light with no reflections on the snapshot that the camera can see. Frame the snapshot with or without a border and record. If you want only a portion of the snapshot to show, frame it accordingly. If you can't focus close enough. You may need to put a diopter lens on your camcorder. They usually come in sets of three and are available at most camera stores. They are not expensive. Check the front thread size of your camera lens for the right size. There are thread size adapters available also.

9. Short video clips may also be included. These may be edited onto the master by simple assembly editing. They can be assembled with original audio or narration can be dubbed on later.

10. When you have the master recording complete you will want to make copies to send to your friends and relatives. Most people have VHS VCRs. Not many have S-VHS or 8mm VCRs so it is best to make VHS copies. Here you will need access to two VCRs or play the master from your camcorder into a VHS VCR. It is a good idea to monitor the recording on a TV or monitor to be sure it is recording both video and sound.

11. Before starting to record your master, record 10 to 20 seconds of black leader.

12. The US Post Office has special boxes designed for mailing VHS tapes by Priority mail. The boxes are free and postage will be about \$3.00 in the US. Some of us cheap screws get the free priority box and turn it inside out and package it ourselves. If you package the tape yourself a bubblepack envelope will cost a bit less than \$1 and the postage first class about \$2.00 or Videotape class about \$1.40. Video class will take longer to get there but you've got plenty of time if you start now - right?

Written by Jim Beach

Let the Audience Judge?

No 11 – March 1993

George Cushman

The contest committee is making the final arrangements for the annual competition. "Who shall we get for judges?" they ask. "Let's let the audience judge this year." Yes, why not? Let everyone vote.

Letting the audience pick the winner is nothing new, but is it fair to the contestants? Will the audience select the best picture? No, they'll pick the one they like the most.

Movie theaters have done this for years. They call it a "box office" vote, or a "popularity vote." At least it prompts viewers to take a greater interest in what they see. But does it select the best picture?

To the story

A popularity vote goes mostly to the story being told, not to the form, which is being used to tell it.

A good comparison would be with a written English composition in a classroom. If two students wrote the same story, but one used the King's English and the other made a

dozen grammatical errors, had misspelled words and wrong punctuation, the story coming through would be the same in either case, but obviously the student using the language properly would be said to have the better composition.

A motion picture is quite the same. It has its own language and its own form, which is like no other. Members of the average audience are not aware of the special demands of the language of the cinema, thus they cannot



be expected to recognize and honor a picture that uses language properly

But then we hear "if a picture is pleasing and entertaining, isn't also good?" Maybe, maybe not. If there were no language to learn, no rules of motion picture making, no "laws" to be observed, then why do film schools exist in so many of our colleges, and now even in our high schools and below?

Club Workshops

Why do clubs sponsor seminars? And devote time to workshop sessions? And have speakers on movie subjects? If proper construction of a picture is not important, let's dissolve our clubs, do away with film schools, burn instruction books and never discuss movie making. If we did we would end up with raw footage which would be boring to watch because the photographer has had no training, no instruction in how to work in the medium being used.

By-Pass what is liked

It is not easy to refrain from voting for a movie we like in favor of one that is much better done. Our festival and most such competitions state that any picture is eligible, thus the story being told is of little consequence, and it is how it is told cinematically that counts. That's what the competition is, a comparison of motion pictures in the classic sense.

A committee's top responsibility

is to the contestants. Only persons who recognize good cinematic work when they see it and have the courage to forget their preferences and vote for what is good should be asked to serve as judges. The sponsor cannot afford to honor "bad grammar and poor punctuation." The contestants deserve prime consideration."

Ask The DOC

Dear Doc:

Usually I do a good job of coming up with ideas for my productions. Lately however, I seem to be stalled on finishing a project. I am dry of ideas and tend to put off finishing the storyline, laying it aside to do other things. I even work in the yard! While now I have the nicest looking yard in the neighborhood, my project remains unfinished. Any encouraging words?

Stalled in the Front Yard.

Dear Stalled:

While generating ideas or brainstorming is a crucial skill for the director, producer and writer, it can be a difficult task when the mind is blocked. Obviously. Putting the story aside and returning to it later isn't working for you. So here are a few suggestions. You must learn to brainstorm on demand. And that is harder than it sounds. Often writers have little rituals they perform before they begin writing such as, using a special pencil, or approaching the writing desk from a certain direction. If you have a favorite room or special writing instrument and it puts you at ease, the use it! Being at ease is critical to letting ideas flow.

Bounce ideas off of friends, family, and colleagues. Often, brainstorming with others can get your mind going again. However, only brainstorm with people you trust. Ideas can

easily get "borrowed." The key to successful brainstorming is to initially accept all ideas offered and then go back and to narrow the choices down based on such limitations as time, equipment, personnel, expense and so on.

Independent Producer Michael Wiese recommends a technique called "Mind Mapping." When using this technique, you write down one word regarding your project or problem in the middle of a sheet of paper. Then for five minutes write down words that relate to the initial word around it. Then go back and circle the words of interest or have meaning. Then spend a few minutes writing words around each of the words that relate to them. Eventually you will solve your problem or narrow your topic down to a doable idea.

Determine your optimum creative time. What part of the day are you at your best? For me, it's five AM. If I have a script problem, I simply set my alarm for 5 AM. When I get up, my mind is working so well, I usually can solve the problem. I can't always seem to do this at the end of the day.

And most of all don't let your mind block stress you. Stress can hinder idea flow. Be sure you enjoy the process of production.

Do any AMPS members have suggestions for overcoming mental blocks? If so please e-mail them to mattj@cameron.edu. If you have a question for the Doc, e-mail them to mattj@cameron.edu.

The Sec- ond Shoe

Stan Whitsitt

In another article I pointed up the importance of the filmmaker getting the attention of the audience immediately with a "Socko" beginning for the film. Commenting on the article, a colleague suggested that the ending of a film was also more important than most people think. Considering his comment and looking back over films I have seen, I am convinced of the wisdom of his thinking.

There is an old story about a man who always dropped his



shoes with a thump when undressing for bed. The lady, in the apartment below him, became so accustomed to the sound of the shoes hitting the floor, that when the upper apartment was later rented to a one-legged man, she sat up all night waiting for the second shoe to drop.

The beginning of a movie is like the first shoe to hit the floor.

(Continued on page 7)

Copyright Clearance

(Editor's Note: The following is an e-mail to Roger Garretson, Secretary/Treasurer of AMPS.)

Hi! Roger and other friends:

As some of you may know, I operate the IAC (Film & Video Institute) Copyright and Film Music Advisory Service for our members.

I am occasionally asked about Copyright clearance (for amateur use) of recorded music, purchased on CD or tape, in countries other than the UK.

IAC has an arrangement with the licensing bodies here - Mechanical Copyright Protection Society (MCPS), British Phonographic Industry (BPI) and Phonographic Performance Ltd. (PPL), whereby our members can purchase twelve monthly licences to cover the dubbing of recorded music on to their productions and play these productions (film, video, AV) in public under agreed conditions - mainly that no commercial gain is involved.

I would be pleased if you can let me know what procedures you adopt in your country for the dubbing of Copyright music on to your members amateur films / videos / AV(slide/tape).

As you see, I am sending this e-mail also to Australia, New Zealand, Estonia, Russia, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Czech Rep., Netherlands, Argentina, Croatia,and also to Canada

where, some years ago, I went over to set up a licensing arrangement (similar to that in UK) with music publishers called THE MUSIC PEOPLE, based in Toronto. They agreed to licence their recordings for use by members of the Society of Canadian Cine Amateurs (SCCA) on payment of an agreed nominal amount. Discs of 'Library Music' could then be purchased from them and used under their licence.

I will hope to hear from all of you in due course. If you are unable to answer, please pass this on to an appropriate person! Very many thanks and good wishes to you all,

Gerald Mee
IAC COPYRIGHT and FILM MUSIC ADVISORY SERVICE

(Please visit our IAC website: www.theiac.org.uk)

Character Counts

(Editor's Note: This is the first of a three part series on developing character. Look for parts 2 and three in upcoming issues.)

David Byland, Professor,
Oklahoma Baptist University

How many good script ideas have you seen fall short of their promise because of poor character development? Whether it's fiction or non-fiction, character counts. That said, how do we create, develop and write characters that are believable, motivated, sympathetic...in short, all of the things that make us human? I believe there are three vital ingredients in developing charac-

ters who will carry the promise of the story into fulfillment:

- Observation
- Fictionalization
- The Golden Key

Observation

As writers, we should always be observing people. Teaching scriptwriting often presents challenges in that the students don't come to the course with very well developed powers of observation. I send them to the local mall, to parks, any place where people gather and interact. The purpose of this exercise is to begin observing for detail. They pick out a half dozen people and carefully detail they appearance, the way they walk and move their body. For example, one observation may go something like this:

- Male, mid 70's
- Sitting on a bench outside the bookstore at the mall.
- Sits slightly slouched to the right and hunched over
- Gray hair, short buzz cut, clean shaven
- Small wart near left nostril
- Thick glasses

...and so on.

The clothing and how it is worn is recorded. Any contacts with other people are recorded. Every behavior is catalogued except what they are talking about (if they are talking) and how they talk. The reason no conversation is recorded is so the observers can be free of that particular constraint when they start "fictionalizing" the person they've observed. Finally the observations are recorded in a spiral notebook for future reference.

(Continued from page 5)

The audience is alerted that something is happening. The story takes off from its beginning and builds up to its high point and then winds down to a definite ending, or that second shoe the audience expects.

There are "arty" films that do not follow the "beginning" – "story" – "end" formula, but in many instances they leave the viewer asking "What have I just seen?" and "Is it over?" Perhaps it is old-fashioned but I prefer stories clean cut, with definite beginnings, normal progression of events and an incisive ending.

An artistic and effective ending to a film seems to be one of the more difficult things to engineer. Of the many amateur movies I have seen (including my own

efforts) the ending seems to be a prevalent weakness. I think, we as filmmakers concentrate more on the beginning and body of the story, and by the time it is finished we are often so tired, and anxious to "get it in the can," we fail to expend an equivalent amount of creative effort on the ending... (after all, if we stick a title saying "The End" on it, the audience has to know our film is complete.) All in all, we just do not consider it as important as the rest of the film.

What can we do to make the finish of our film as artistic and effective as the rest of it? The best method is to consider the ending when making up the script and concentrate as much effort on the closing portion of the film as the beginning. With the beginning and ending worked out, the body of the

story is not difficult to tie to each portion.

If one is working without a script, as in vacation footage or a sporting event, be alert for scenes or shots that can be used as dramatic endings, and transitions leading the viewer and preparing for the closing. A weak closing scene can be strengthened by narration, but as always, the filmmaker should strive to rely on visual impact.

In summary, close your film with a "bang" instead of a whimper. Plan your ending as carefully as you plan the opening and body of the film. Don't keep your audience on the edge of the seat after your movie is finished. Give them that second shoe and let them go home!

Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival Name & Address for forms	Open to:	Sub-ject	For-mats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
12/15/00	Spindletop/Lamar Univ. Film Festival Lamar Univ. Dept of Communication P.O. Box 10050, Beaumont, TX 77710	ABC DE		Note 2		\$10 hs, college students \$15 others	U	N/A
12/28/00	Double Take Documentary Film Festival Center for Documentary Studies 1317 W. Pettigrew St, Durham, NC 27705 www.bmtcvb@beaumontcvb.com	ABC DE		JK Note 2	NONE	\$35		N/A
2/23/01	Clearwater Int'l Film Festival, 411 Cleveland St., Clearwater, FL 33755 www.clearwaterfestival.com	ABC DEG						N/A
1/6/01	IAC Int'l & Video Festival 24c West Street, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 7RJ UK or http://www.theiac.org.uk	ABC	G	HJMNO PZ PAL, NT SC, SE CAM	NONE	See note 1 below	T, some cash, U V,W	3/30 to 4/1/01

N/A Not Announced or Not Available

ALL FORMATS ARE NTSC UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch	D Independent E Commercial F Restricted	G Open H S8 J 16mm	K Other L 3/4" M VHS	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8 Z MiniDV	Q Invitatatl R Regional S Exceptions	T U V Cash Trophies Certificate	W X Y Other Award Approximate It Varies
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Note 1~~~ One minute competition £5, Up to 30 minutes £9, over 30 minutes £12 Plus £1 handling charge for non IAC members plus return postage if videos/films are to be returned (ALL in STERLING DRAFTS)

Note 2—Preview on VHS tape

AMPS DUES INCREASE

Unfortunately, costs still rise and it's hard to stay ahead. So AMPS dues will be increased on January 1st, 2001. The increase will be from \$7 to \$10 for U.S. memberships.

If you renew your membership before the renewal date listed on your mailing label, the dues will remain \$7 for the upcoming year.

At \$10, AMPS membership is still a great bargain. You receive six issues of the "Movie Makers" newsletter, you have an opportunity to contribute to the newsletter. And your memberships helps supports the oldest continuously run film/video festival in the world.

From:
American Motion Picture Society
30 Kanan Road
Oak Park, California
91377-1105

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 7.00

Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 9.00

Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) \$10.00

Enclosed _____

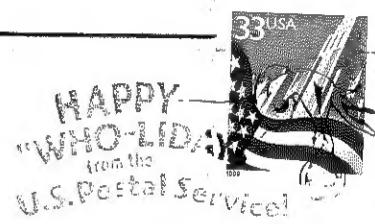
NAME: _____

ADDRESS : _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Mail to: AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105



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